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Garrison Command Skills for Success

By Colonel Charles D. Allen

At the time of the publication of this article, the slate of garrison commanders who will assume leadership of installations in the summer of 2008 is well known. Incoming commanders are looking at calendars to coordinate attendance at precommand courses, completing requirements of their current positions, and preparing for the upcoming assumptions of command.

In the summer 2007 issue of the "Journal of Installation Management," I suggested that garrison commanders have the unique responsibility of leading at several levels – direct, organizational, and strategic – and so require an equally unique skill set.¹ The garrison commanders' tasks are to clearly state the importance of mission, then establish the vision, build the team, and execute the strategy. The recently released "Field Manual (FM) 6-22: Army Leadership"² carries as its by-line the desired attributes of the leader as "Competent, Confident and Agile." These attributes apply to the leaders of garrisons, as well. The field manual also lists several sets of competencies grouped under the titles of lead, develop and achieve.

The question a new garrison commander might ask is, "What skills are needed to lead the organization and develop the capacities to achieve the mission in support of the agencies and activities that depend on it?"

To address this question, one can go to several sources. Naturally, I started with materials from our U.S. Army War College (USAWC) curriculum and focused on what is taught in our Strategic Leadership course. Then I looked in detail at our leadership doctrine as captured in FM 6-22. I also contacted a small group of installation management professionals, both uniformed and civilian, that included experienced

garrison commanders, a garrison command sergeant major, senior staff members at the lieutenant colonel- and colonel-level commands, and an Installation Management Command (IMCOM) region director. This was an opportunity to match the classroom academics on the subject to the realities that garrison leaders face everyday.

Our core course uses the "Strategic Leadership Primer"³ that is the off-

Attributes
What an Army leader is

A Leader of character

- Army values
- Empathy
- Warrior Ethos

A Leader with presence

- Military bearing
- Physically fit
- Composed, confident
- Resilient

A Leader with intellectual capacity

- Mental agility
- Sound judgment
- Innovation
- Interpersonal tact
- Domain knowledge

Figure 1. The Army Leadership Requirement Model⁸



spring of a 1991 USAWC conference that explored this aspect of senior leadership. The primer is in its second edition and has provided an Army leadership framework that has been considered useful in understanding the overlapping roles and responsibilities of senior leaders. A major contribution of the primer is the presentation of strategic-leadership competencies that have been recurrent in the findings of subsequent studies of senior-

leader skill sets⁴ and most recently reinforced in the 2004 study of division commanders from Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF).⁵ Competencies are defined as the knowledge, skills and abilities that enable the leader to accomplish the organizational mission and to take care of its people. Competencies can be acquired and developed through several means – experiences during operational assignments, as part of a formal education program, and through personal development. Command-selected officers have been successful at the direct level of leadership and bring a wealth of experiences from their operational deployments. However, in the transition to organizational-level leadership, incoming garrison commanders should focus their preparation on gaining and exercising competencies that facilitate the success of their garrison.

The USAWC model groups several skill sets under the categories of conceptual, technical and interpersonal competencies.⁶ Conceptual competencies include the thinking skills required to function effectively in an environment of complexity and ambiguity. Such an environment routinely provides challenges to garrisons and confronts the leader with tough, competing issues that may not be resolved with clear, neat solutions.

Today's Army leaders must recognize that such issues exist and must seek to understand these tough problems. This acceptance leads to a deeper examination and search for apparently unrelated issues that may be connected. A quick and easily implemented decision can have second- and third-order effects with unintended consequences. Senior leaders must heed the wise caution to "make haste slowly"⁷ so that the urgency of near-term situations does not supplant the importance of issues

that support the long-term relevance of the organization.

Imagine the garrison commander who has a pending redeployment of units from OIF and restationing of forces from Europe. Preparation for the influx of troops requires an understanding of military construction for building headquarters, unaccompanied housing, and training ranges that happen over a longer time horizon than a typical three-year command tour. The arriving units will be under two command headquarters – U.S. Army Forces Command (FORSCOM) and U.S. Army Europe (USAREUR) – which will require extensive coordination. Funding streams from IMCOM may have earmarks for specific programs and therefore are not subject to reprogramming at the installation or may not be sufficient. This illustration helps to understand the complexity of garrison missions and underscores the need for conceptual competency of the commander in the face of ambiguity. The garrison commander is challenged to meet the strategic intent to provide facilities for incoming personnel with potentially limited resources for the execution or lack of clarity in the priorities.

Technical competencies require an understanding of the organizational processes and support systems for installation management. Also required is an appreciation of the functional relationships outside of the organization with partners on the installation, those in the local community, and with the region headquarters. The leader must know the professional responsibilities and the mission requirements of the command. Technical competencies include knowledge of external command structures and politics, financial systems, and social programs that

"Commanders must know how and when to delegate and empower their subordinates. The garrison/installation world is extremely complex and not to be done alone. The real experts are your directors and deputies and as a point of emphasis for me, my CSM."

A garrison commander

affect the organization.

The Garrison Pre-Command Course (GPCC) has a comprehensive program of instruction that outlines the strategic vision and direction for installation management, and identifies the prescribed duties of the garrison commanders and command sergeants major. The GPCC provides a baseline of technical instruction on structures and processes (e.g., personnel management, budgeting and cost control, environment, etc.). Importantly, the GPCC presents contemporary installation issues as well as key areas of concern such as the ongoing discussion of the responsibilities of IMCOM vis-à-vis senior commanders. This discussion is especially pertinent given that

"Building a coalition at the garrison functional level is crucial because a GC doesn't 'own' all of the services or assets in the garrison. For example: AAFES, DeCA, banking facilities, CIO/G6 (overseas), MI, civilian personnel services all belong to other commands."

A former deputy garrison commander

installation management is a fledgling activity within Department of the Army and with the establishment of IMCOM in the 21st century.

Strategic issues are being addressed by the corporate leadership of the Army with the Assistant Chief of Staff for Installation Management (ACSIM) as the principal agent. It is prudent for the garrison commander to develop an executive-level understanding of the recent program initiatives of Lean Six Sigma (LSS), Common Levels of Support (CLS), the National Security Personnel System (NSPS), and the 2005 Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC), as well as ongoing A-76 competitive-sourcing actions.

Perhaps interpersonal competencies are the most difficult to develop, as they entail the "softer side" of leadership. The garrison commander is responsible for managing diversity within the organization, working with other cultures (particularly when overseas), building consensus with multiple constituents and communicating effectively with internal and external audiences. The heart of our business is to lead people – whether in the field, in an Army command headquarters or on the installations where our Army works, lives, trains, and plays.

FM 6-22 is a good starting point for interpersonal leadership competencies in that it does a good job of communicating the complexities of contemporary environment. It acknowledges the challenges in operational units that execute full-spectrum missions and functional agencies that support Title 10 responsibilities. Where the previous FM 22-100 presented 41 leader competencies, the new FM 6-22 identifies eight core competencies for Army leaders (See Figure 1) in

an attempt to provide a manageable number for focus. However, as one turns to Appendix A, those eight competencies are further deconstructed into 55 leader actions.

With the abundance of lists of what a leader is supposed to be good at, this article offers a few items from my experiences, and the experiences of others, that may assist incoming leaders in preparing for assumption of garrison command.

Leadership and Team-building

Garrison commanders enter organizations where the structure is already determined and in place. Generally, each conforms to a standard garrison organization that has well-defined functional responsibilities. In most cases, the civilian work force is also well established with people who are experts in their field and who have extensive experience in providing service to their local community. The command team of the deputy garrison commander (DGC) and command sergeant major (CSM) is likely to be the same team from the previous commander. The DGC and CSM have a wealth of knowledge about the specific garrison environment and will offer different perspectives that are invaluable. Thus, working as a strong senior-leadership team can yield a situation in which the "whole is greater than the sum of its parts." The same can be expected with the staff directors and deputies of the functional areas. Both sets of teams performed to some degree of effectiveness before the new commander arrived – it would be naïve and pretentious to believe otherwise.

The primary goal for the new leader is to become a value-added quantity to the organization. Added to this is the challenge to lead a predominantly civilian organization that is likely to be distinctly differ-

ent from previous assignments and experiences. Commanders will encounter a diverse work force that provides garrison services with a significant number of contractors. They may be confronted with allegations of a hostile work environment related to the behavior of a supervisor, or deal with perceptions of discrimination in promotion decisions. Commanders may, for the first time, face union and Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) issues that do not exist in operational units.

Regardless of the new context, the

"Knowing how to influence and develop your staff directly relates to how much time the GC has (Does he have to drill down, ask the hard questions, walk the dog with the staff, or have they been trained to do that BEFORE they show up at his conference table?)."

A former deputy garrison commander

leadership responsibilities are the same. To achieve the organizational mission, the commander has to develop teams at three levels: the command team, the functional team, and the team of external stakeholders.

The first two teams are wholly within the organization – stable and inherited. These teams are under the direct influence of the commander. However, the team of stakeholders is much more fluid in its composition and may consist of members that come and go depending on the purposes that bring them together. In this case, the commander is generally not in a position of authority but may be the one who can coalesce the

collection of people from disparate activities to address the garrison mission requirements. In that capacity, the garrison commander must be able to influence others to manage problems or to seize opportunities that emerge.

The challenge for garrison commanders is to adjust current leadership style or behaviors to the internal groups based upon their level of expertise and need. Commanders must quickly realize that the functional work force has extensive expertise that garrison commanders cannot hope to match. The environmental engineer, child development associate, range coordinator, and budget analyst are examples of highly skilled members within the work force who are capable and, therefore, should be empowered to do their jobs. A garrison commander only has to visit the Child Development Center during the morning drop-off period to appreciate the talents and abilities of the caregivers.

The same is often true with the direct reports of commanders and their deputies; it is a rare commander who has experience in running Public Works, Morale, Welfare, and Recreation, Emergency Services, and Information or Resource Management agencies. Therefore, a "first-rate" commander has to "recognize when subordinates already have it right and to either build on their successes or get out of the way."⁹

This hearkens back to the enduring themes of early studies that found that leader behaviors were categorized as initiating structures to accomplish tasks and developing relationships among the members. Later research identified critical leader functions based upon what leaders do – monitor performance and take action to improve performance or to resolve problems. The other key function is where

the leader focuses his effort and attention – on issues internal to the team or on issues that are external but directly affect the team.¹⁰ However, what may be apparent is that some supervisors and managers have been placed in positions of leadership without the benefit and experiences that officers and noncommissioned officers have acquired within the professional military education (PME) system. It is incumbent upon the commander to develop the leadership capacity of its senior members and midlevel

sions and identification of goals are essential. A new commander briefed his staff using the No. 1 principle shown in Figure 2. This is a clear statement of what is important in the command and what is expected of the garrison team.

The second area for garrison team effectiveness is meeting the needs of its members. The garrison commander should encourage and support collaboration among the subordinate directorates and agencies. Accordingly, the commander

learn much about the transition to privatized Army Family housing by polling the net of other installations that have gone through the early stages of the Residential Communities Initiative (RCI). With RCI, the stakeholders include the contractor, local civic leaders and the tenant unit commanders whose members have a vested interest in the quality of government quarters. Effective garrison commanders also stay connected to other garrison commanders and the region staff to share and garner information that

No. 1 Principle

- Focus on the basics

- Determine what you & your organization does (core functions) –

- Focus your effort on these

- finite resources
 - finite time
 - finite energy
- (you can't do everything)

- If it doesn't contribute to taking care of our Soldiers, Families, employees, the installation, the environment...then question whether we should be doing it.

This applies at all levels

Figure 2. Guidance to Garrison Teams¹¹

management within the garrison. In many cases, those positions have been assigned based upon technical expertise or longevity of service without the opportunity to learn, develop and exercise leadership competencies. Thus, the commander has the opportunity and the obligation to mentor the senior civilians in the organization. In building an effective garrison team, clarity of purpose, mis-

should demonstrate commitment and concern for the work force and require that leaders throughout the organization do the same.

The garrison commander must be skilled at crossing the organizational boundary to build teams with stakeholders and must be connected to a network of those who can provide resources and advocate for the interests of the installation. A commander can

may be useful for common challenges. In addition, the commander should understand the need to actively scan the external environment and assess potential impacts (good or bad).

The key component of the interpersonal competencies is the ability to communicate to internal and external audiences. The garrison commander will be expected to speak

to the work force, to school children, to spouse groups, to the local chamber of commerce and to civic leaders. Regardless of the venue, the message should be clear and consistent – an expression of why and how the garrison serves its community.

In summary, the skills that a garrison commander needs are many, but the framework of conceptual, technical, and interpersonal competencies may help to focus on what is most effective. It is my opinion (and that of others) that the distinguishing competencies of highly successful leaders are the ability to build teams that can meet and conquer challenges. Building and maintaining such high-performing teams are accomplished through effective communication and by providing what the teams need in order to accomplish their purposes. The garrison commander must be positioned at the decisive point (either in location or time) to monitor and assess what action needs to be taken. In many cases, what the team may need is for the commander to provide the tools so they can “get ‘er done.”

Conclusion

How does a commander know when the teams are working? I offer a short anecdote. In 1998, at the end of a visit by the commanding general, USAREUR, General Eric Shinseki, to my base support battalion (BSB) community, I received a telephone call notification that a U.S. Army military intelligence aircraft was missing and believed to have crashed in a field by a small German town in the BSB footprint. When I arrived at the crash site, the host nation police and fire department were there alongside the BSB safety and emergency response personnel. The incident commander was the aviation battalion commander from a corps unit and was receiving information from the BSB airfield

manager. The BSB public affairs officer was coordinating with local media for coverage of a very sensitive event. What I saw was the nexus of teams performing a must-do-it-right mission. Teams internal to the BSB were working together across organizational boundaries and national lines of authority. They recognized the importance of the task at hand and applied their expertise to handle a bad situation in a highly professional matter. I could not have asked for more.

This short but intense example is but one of many that I experienced during my command tenure with motivated and talented teams of garrison professionals. Incoming commanders have the privilege of ensuring that these teams have the leadership they deserve.

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